

**This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.**

**Author(s):** Kantanen, Anna; Eilola, Jari

**Title:** Domestic Homicide and Emotions from the Late Nineteenth Century to the 1920s

**Year:** 2021

**Version:** Accepted version (Final draft)

**Copyright:** © The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer

**Rights:** In Copyright

**Rights url:** <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/?language=en>

**Please cite the original version:**

Kantanen, A., & Eilola, J. (2021). Domestic Homicide and Emotions from the Late Nineteenth Century to the 1920s. In M. Husso, S. Karkulehto, T. Saesma, A. Laitila, J. Eilola, & H. Siltala (Eds.), *Violence, Gender and Affect : Interpersonal, Institutional and Ideological Practices* (pp. 49-69). Palgrave Macmillan. Palgrave Studies in Victims and Victimology. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56930-3\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56930-3_3)

# Domestic Homicide and Emotions from the Late 19th Century to the 1920s

*Anna Kantanen & Jari Eilola*

The aim of our chapter is to investigate the nature and characteristics of domestic homicides in Finland and examine how interpersonal violence was represented in the records of the Turku Court of Appeal and in contemporary newspapers between 1890 and 1930. This chapter traces lethal domestic violence cases and disaggregates them to uncover how offenders committed crimes and how they appealed to their emotions as an explanation. By addressing these questions, we ought to deepen our understanding of historical European domestic homicides.

Some studies have suggested that there was a crucial qualitative change in homicides and violence in Europe between the late 19th and early 20th century (Cottier & Raciti 2013; Roth 2009; Ferguson 2010). The new type of violence which emerged, *fatalistic violence* (Cottier & Raciti 2013), was characterised by strong feelings between perpetrators and their victims. Most of these victims were spouses, lovers, children, and other relatives. These violent acts were planned, and they often had a relatively long prehistory involving threats of homicide. On the other hand, no quarrelling occurred before the murder. The perpetrators intended to kill, and many aimed to commit a suicide after the crime. Their narratives were strongly subjective and emphasised emotional disturbance and inner life.

There are several reasons for studying domestic violence, and particularly in Finland, an agriculture-based society located in Northern Europe, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Firstly, important changes were made in the legislation concerning domestic violence during this time. Although Finland had become an autonomous grand duchy of the Russian Empire in 1809 (and it remained as such until the 1917 declaration of independence), the shared Swedish legal and social systems' influence persisted. The Swedish Code of the Realm of 1734 was still in effect until 1894, when the Penal Code of 1889 came into effect in Finland. Although the Code of 1734 had restricted the use of physical chastisement (used by husband and master of the household towards wives and other adult members of the household), the new Penal Code criminalised it and such chastisement was defined as a complainant offence. In contrast, the right to chastise children continued for decades. (Pylkkänen 2009, 38–40, 183; Lindstedt Cronberg 2009, 29–30, 43–49)

Another reason for studying Finland is the exceptional development of lethal violence. During the period of industrialisation, while the homicide rate decreased in most western European countries, they began to increase in Finland. At the turn of the century Finland experienced several waves of increasing homicides. Firstly, the newly established forest industrial rural communities generated many of these homicides. These towns lacked infrastructure to control their population. The forest industry was male-dominated and sensitive to economic fluctuations. Violence was also associated with heavy drinking. The second one was connected to the political turmoil surrounding the First Russian Revolution (1905) and its Finnish counterpart, the Great Strike. The third wave shook the new republic after the Civil War (1918) until the end of the Great Depression. Although homicide remained a problem of working-class men, the rise in homicide rate was also caused by the rural population, specifically young men from land-owning farmer families. The high level of lethal violent crime in Finland was the result of interaction of several coinciding factors. (Lehti 2001, 51–58)

The first historical studies concerning domestic violence in Western countries were published in the 1980s (e.g. Pleck 1987; Gordon 1988). These pioneering works reflected ongoing feminist and social discussion of domestic violence and wife beating, which had been recognised in the 1970s as serious social problem (Bala 2008, 273–274). The first studies were published over a decade later in the Nordic countries (e.g. Lövkrona (ed.) 2001). Since then, family violence and gender-based violence have rapidly emerged as areas of historical research, and scholars, focusing on the 19th and 20th and century, have studied for instance, spousal violence (Lindstedt Cronberg 2009; Eriksson 2010), violence against children (e.g. Koskivirta 2017a & 2017b), parricide (Toivo 2018), and infanticide (e.g. Bergenlöv 2009; Rautelin 2017). However, gaps remain in our knowledge of the characteristics of domestic homicides in Northern Europe in the 19th and 20th century.

### **Court of appeal records and newspapers as mirrors of domestic homicides in history**

The main source of this study concerns homicide cases from the Appellation Court at Turku, which was a mid-level judicial institution. One of its functions was to confirm the sentences of the lower courts concerning severe crimes and to supervise their legality (Toivo 2016, 256). In the Appellation Court, criminal cases were handled in a written proceeding. The decisions of

the Court are archived in series of a judgement records, which forms our main source. They include the basic information of the parties (name, social status, affinity), synopses of the circumstances (where, when), modus operandi, outcomes of forensic medicine, and mental state examination reports, and, the legal basis of the judgement.

Our chapter covers a roughly 40-year span of time, from 1891 to 1929. Due to the vast spectrum and number of the crimes dealt with by the Appellation Court, we have used a sample survey for this study to unravel the overall picture of domestic homicides. The years of analysis (1891–1898, 1901–1908, 1911–1912, 1915, 1918, 1920–1922, 1925, 1929) have been selected from the beginning of the period studied, which provide an annual representation of the lethal domestic violence cases; for the end of the period, we have sampling units from various years. This study encompasses domestic homicides, murders, attempted manslaughters and fatal assaults. It focuses on close relatives such as spouses, parents, children (excluding infanticides), and siblings as well step-relatives and other relatives, if the relation was explicitly expressed in the court documents. In our analysis, we have also included homicides involving members of the same household or domestic servants who were accused or victims of the crime.

The judgement records do not always include information concerning the motives behind homicide. Therefore, we have employed newspaper reports as our secondary source (see also Ramsey 2006, 108). We have used the digital newspaper collection of the National Library. The number of Finnish newspapers grew rapidly, and their circulation expanded during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The newspapers were sensationalist in the sense that they purveyed emotionally charged content, such as detailed reports of criminal cases and homicides (Valtonen 2003, 312–313; Wiltenburg 2004). Newspapers also reported local rumours. Consequently, news items could be contradictory and contain false information, such as that concerning the social position or age of the parties. However, we can safely assume that newspaper accounts reflected collectively shared attitudes towards domestic violence (see also Wilkinson 2020, 209).

Our approach in defining domestic violence is based on historical research. In many ways, historical sources might be more silent on mild domestic violence since some form of chastisement towards women and children was long acceptable and tolerable (Koskivirta 2017b, 46–48, 56–63; Pylkkänen 2009, 40; Bergenlöv 2009). To trace domestic violence from the past, we concentrate on homicides, which are generally considered a relatively reliable form

of violence, since in most cases they are revealed just after the crime or later (Daly & Wilson 2014, 11–12). This is noticeable in our source material as well, since a fraction of the domestic homicides were not treated as homicides at first but rather as accidents, suicides, or cases of missing person. However, when employing historical statistics on homicides, scholars face some methodological challenges (Mc Mahon, Eibach & Roth 2013, 8–11; Smith 2014, 140). In the historical analysis presented here, we refer to domestic violence as intentional physical harm towards another family member or deliberate neglect against another person.

### **Domestic violence: Spousal killings, generational quarrels, and fraternal confrontations**

We have traced 104 severe domestic violence cases from the higher court records (see Table 3.1), which constitute our data. These cases have been classified in eight main categories. The accused also include those who were accused of complicity, such as those who had participated in one way or another in the crime or had incited the perpetrator. The crimes represent all domestic violence cases dealt with by the Appellation Court, and they depict cases which might have resulted in a sentence or ensued as an acquittal, typically due to inadequate evidence. In the cases handled in the Appellation Court, men committed the majority of domestic homicides, although women were sometimes perpetrators as well. In terms as victims, women had a more prominent role, although male victims encompassed the larger share of lethal domestic violence cases.

**Table 3.1** Types of domestic homicides and attempted murders under the jurisdiction of the Turku Court of Appeal from 1891 to 1929

Type	Number (%)	Accused		Victims	
		M	F	M	F
<b>Marital violence</b>	37 (35,6)	30	14	12	25
<b>Violence towards parents</b>	19 (18,3)	20	2	15	4
<b>Violence towards one's own children</b>	6 (5,7)	3	4	4	2
<b>Violence between siblings</b>	13 (12,5)	13	-	13	-
<b>Violence against parents-in-laws</b>	5 (4,8)	5	1	3	2

<b>Violence against other household members</b>	9 (8,7)	9	3	8	1
<b>Multiple victim homicide and assault</b>	10 (9,6)	7	3	14	13
<b>Others</b>	5 (4,8)	8	1	4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>104 (100)</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>48</b>

Sources: The National Archives of Finland, Turku. The Turku Court of Appeal, judgement records 1891–1898, 1901–1908, 1911–1912, 1915, 1918, 1920–1922, 1925, 1929.

The largest category of domestic violence were marital homicides in which a husband killed his wife. The second largest type was parricide by a victim's son or stepson. Killing one's own brother was the third largest category of domestic homicide. These intra-family homicide cases not only represent the main types of family murders but also provide insight regarding emotional factors and illustrating affections within a household. A common theme in many domestic violence cases was prolonged violence or threats of violence within the households. A close analysis of court dossiers uncovers domestic disturbances, which in many cases involved a long prehistory of discord and which were sparked by an individual quarrel or alcohol consumption. Both the perpetrators and the victims had previously announced death threats against family members.

Most of the family homicides occurred in the domestic sphere, such as in the homes of the victim and the offender or a relative's residence or surroundings nearby. Forests and public roads also became scenes of crimes. Neighbours and other household members witnessed quarrels within the family. They had heard uproar before the violent act, and after the crime they testified that there had been discordance between family members (1929,div.I,n:o26, *Uusi Suomi* 13.2.1929). Neighbourly intervention took place at times when they came to check on the situation after they had heard a cry for help, although they were too late to prevent death (1929,div.VI,n:o60; *Aamulehti* 24.7.1929). Killing an escaping spouse illustrates a strong sense of determination by the offender. At gunpoint, the victim had fled from a window, hurting herself, and some neighbours had then carried her back inside where her husband shot her to death (1925,div.IV,n:o26; *Keski-Uusimaa* 1.4.1925). Neighbours' activity proves that communities were constituted through the self-regulation of members' behaviour (Ferguson 2010, 94, 108–111). Furthermore, local rumours which were attributed to relatives, neighbours,

and other members of the community were a relevant matter in crimes being revealed after a death in suspicious circumstances.

Domestic homicides were also committed in front of other family members (1929,div.IV,n:o26; *Satakunnan Kansa* 19.2.1929). Consequently, other family members or servants were not only aware of violent acts in families; they could also participate in them. In one case, a housemaid had helped her mistress to poison the master (PL 40/1894), and in another, a wife had negotiated with her husband before poisoning her own mother (HL 29/1901). At times, there was a need for an official presence of some kind in quarrelsome family encounters. For example, in a dispute over a matter of inheritance, a police officer was present to accompany a man when he was fetching a cow from his stepson. However, this did not prevent violence from occurring, since the stepson shot his stepfather (1929,div.I,n:o79; *Aamulehti* 18.7.1929). This also illustrated another feature of family homicides. Firearms were applied more often in domestic homicides from the beginning of 20th century onwards (see also Lehti 2001, 62–63), than in the beginning of our study in the 19th century.

Rather than killing a family member by oneself, domestic murders could be carried out by a hired killer as well (PL 17/1901; 1915,div.III,n:o8). In another case, it was suggested that the perpetrator had initially attempted to recruit ‘some laddies’ to kill his father-in-law, yet he had to conduct the crime himself (1922,div.I,n:o22; *Satakunnan Kansa* 16.04.1922).

### ***Marital violence***

In our data, marital lethal violence was the most significant form of domestic homicides, which was eminently gendered crime. Husband poisonings (On Sweden see Nilsson 2015), which comprised a prominent type of homicide carried out by women at the turn of the century, diminished in our material when entering the last decades of this study. A teacher’s murder in 1892 is an illustrative example of such a case. It was revealed that the perpetrator had poisoned her husband because she had secretly borrowed his money and even forged his signature on financial obligations. She was described in newspapers as a superficial person whose aim was to find ‘childish amusements’. Although her husband had been generous towards her, she had lied and stolen from him. She was also stigmatised as *delicti de nato*, ‘a natural born criminal’, because she had previously been expelled from school as a pilferer and a liar (HL 49/1892, *Uusi Suomi* 9.4.1892, *Lappeenrannan Uutiset* 26.10.1892).

Some female offenders had economic motivations. They had sought an older man with property, married him, and then shortly after the weddings (TL 30/1902; *Åbo Tidning* 16.8., 23.8., 2.10.1902) or after changes in testament (PL 40/1894), killed him. The economic motives behind these crimes seem to be undeniable, but in newspapers they also served as narratives which maintained and confirmed certain cultural hierarchies and stereotypes. The household was a nexus for the conversion of economic capital into material goods. Its survival depended on maintaining a careful balance between contributions and the interests of its members. On the other hand, middle-class women, such as the teacher's wife above, withdrew from active roles in their family businesses and transitioned into domestic roles of homemaking and charity work (Ferguson 2010, 56–59, 66–67). The focus on economic motives in the news emphasised female selfishness and women's desire for merchandise and money. It also illustrated what might happen when this desire collided with the control of the master of the household. At the same time, a man who had married a wealthy older woman was described as comical and unmanly (*Westra Finland* 2.7.1892).

During the latter part of our research period, cases in marital violence category were mainly acts wherein husbands killed or attempted to kill their wives, while women less frequently killed their wedded husbands. This is consistent with findings from other countries (e.g. Adler 2003; Roth 2014, 183–185; Wilkinson 2020, 215). At times, female spousal killers had accomplices, or when they killed (or tried to kill) their husbands, they murdered their children as well. Male offenders also killed their wives in situations in which marital violence escalated to homicide; further, they committed spousal murders as premeditated acts. Court documents and newspaper articles capture the tendencies of troubled marriages that escalated into violent conflicts. It appears that women did not kill their husbands in self-defence or for revenge for continued marital violence; rather, men killed their wives after the prolonged violence or threat of it (UL 44/1906; 1918,div.I,n:o11, *Björneborgs Tidning* 13.11.1917; 1929,div.I,n:o84, *Aamulehti* 12.10.1928).

Many of these crimes involved excessive alcohol consumption by the perpetrator, and in many cases, the shared family life was burdened by regular drunkenness. Before lethal violent events, wives had in some cases already moved out to other residences or were living temporarily (or regularly) with relatives (1912,div.VI,n:o23, *Turun Sanomat* 4.8.1912; 1929,div.II,n:o 69; 1918,Div.I,n:o11, *Björneborgs Tidning* 13.11.1917). In some cases, wives had asked another



person to stay with them to ensure that the presence of others would strain the husband from killing her. For example, one married couple had habitually consumed high volumes of alcohol and after hard drinking, they often argued with each other. The wife, who had subverted socially accepted gender norms through her alleged unfaithfulness and by living a hard-drinking life, had been afraid of her husband and asked an acquaintance to stay home with her (1911,div.I,n:o58; *Uusi Suometar* 8.7.1911).

A salient type of marital homicides were homicides which occurred when the wife had expressed her wish for a divorce or after the wife had already left the family home (e.g. 1918,div.I,n:o11, *Työmies* 13.11.1917; see also Ferguson 2010, 99, 106–108; Roth 2014, 184). In these kinds of cases, the threat of violence was not restricted to the wife but was also directed toward her close relatives, especially if they were female or if they were active participants in domestic conflicts, as they often were (Ferguson 2010, 101–102).

### ***Violence against parents and parents-in-law***

Lethal violence against parents were primarily crimes committed by young men in their 20s or boys verging on adulthood towards their fathers. Mothers were rarely victims of such homicides, although sons sometimes committed or attempted manslaughters and murders against them (1912,div.V,n:o11; 1921,div.I,n:o54). It was common in cases of patricide, as for male-on-male violence in general, that the perpetrator was provoked because of the aggressive behaviour of the victim (1911,div.I,n:o45; *Uusi Suometar* 25.5.1911; Cottier & Raciti 2013, 108). Some cases reveal a lifelong series of violent abuse. In 1892, a crofter's adult son who had recently killed his father stated that he had never really loved his father and stepmother, neither hated them. He described his stepmother as a tough woman who also instigated the father against his son. Harsh words and spanking became daily occurrences. As a grown-up man, he still feared his father's anger and aggressiveness (PL 11/1893).

The newspapers described the victim as a tall, strong man, 'decent in every sense'. The perpetrator was his opposite: a short, pale, feeble man, 'weak in physical and mental sense'. The strict upbringing was noticed, and although one newspaper even admitted that it might have caused the perpetrator's weakness, there was no empathy for the patricide (*Tampereen Uutiset* 7.10., 19.11.1892). These statements reflect a patriarchal understanding of the household hierarchy, which emphasised the father's power. They also reflect contemporary medical-moralistic opinions regarding the healthy mind living in a strong athletic body.

Patricides also stemmed from broader conflicts between several family members, as is suggested in one case where the offender had come to a culminated household argument prior killing his father (1911,div.I,n:o45). It appears obvious that in the case above (PL 11/1893), patricide was a consequence of fear and a violent upbringing, but there were also other motives. The perpetrator had found a young woman and begun to think that it was his father's time to step aside. However, the old master made no such attempts. Instead, he was getting married for the third time (PL 11/1893). Such questions of authority and the transfer of generations did not cause tensions merely between fathers and sons, but also between sons- and fathers-in-law, especially if the former had moved to his wife's home. In one such case (HL 38&51/1891, *Hämäläinen* 9.5.1891), the old master was not satisfied with his son-in-law but frequently called him, for instance, a thief. Relations between men worsened irreversibly. One day, the son-in-law heard that strange men allegedly gossiped about him as a thief. Bitterness and anger filled him. He went to his father-in-law, asking 'why have you lied and publicly called me a thief?', overwhelming him in anger and thereby causing his accidental death.

In some cases, the motivational factor was based on economic disputes (1929,div.I,n:o79.). In the case of the crofter's son (PL 11/1893) mentioned above, the father's attempt to remarry once again caused the perpetrator to worry about his inheritance, which increased tensions between the generations. These kinds of economic questions seem to have been important sources of conflicts which evoked strong feelings in domestic violence cases. Economic factors proved to be important components in homicides related to the system of retirement contracts, as well as in cases where there were no biological family ties (1915,div.III,n:o8).

In some cases, killing one's own father was regarded as to some degree justifiable by the press as well as contemporaries. When a father had robbed the family's property to finance his drinking with deplorable people, a son shot his father, who was again appropriating property from the croft, after shooting several warning gunshots (1911,div.VI,n:o7, *Turun Sanomat* 20.12.1910). In this case, the victim failed to fulfil the society's expectations as a father, a husband, and a master of the household. Drinking, wasting money, alienating friends and relatives, and losing his good name were all factors which could produce male violence towards wives and children (Roth 2009, 258–260). On the other hand, they were also factors which made it easier, if not to accept, then at least to understand the mitigation behind an otherwise strictly sanctioned violent act.

Mothers and mothers-in-law faced violence only occasionally in our sources. A factory worker had returned to her mother shortly after she had married (HL 91/1893). Her husband visited his mother-in-law occasionally to see his wife. During one such visit, the mother-in-law criticized him for his disregard towards his wife and for neglecting his marital responsibilities. Both the mother and daughter stated that at this moment, something changed in his being and behaviour. Since then, they both feared that he might return to harm them.

### ***Sibling homicides: Fatal quarrels between brothers***

Killing one's own brother or stepbrother was one of the most common types of lethal violence within the family. Both parties were typically young adults or boys who were reaching adulthood in the near future. Occasionally, victims and offenders were middle-aged men (1929,div.I,n:o6). In many cases, an ordinary argument between brothers escalated into a death of another brother. The court records and newspaper articles tend to not reveal significant reasons for brothers fighting, yet the lethal altercation could be characterised more in terms of quarrels about common matters. Three cases of fratricide illustrate this factor. For example, a game of cards between adult brothers had become heated when another brother had refused to pay after gambling (1929,div.VII,n:o1, *Helsingin Sanomat* 08.10.1928). In another case, an argument over a younger brother coming along for a celebration had escalated into a violent fight between brothers (1911,div.V,n:o17, *Helsingin Sanomat* 27.6.1911). Additionally, deaths occurred when one brother entered into a quarrel between his brother and his fiancée to calm the overheated brother (1929,div.II,n:o27, *Helsingin Sanomat* 25.09.1928).

Aggressive reactions against aggressive behaviour, explained as a response to provocation, self-defence, or an attempt to protect those present, are common for male-on-male violence (Cottier & Raciti 2013, 108). In this sense, the forms and motives of violent acts between brothers seems to resemble those between men in general, as physical and verbal provocation as well as self-defence were underlying features in homicides between brothers (1925,div.IV,n:o53; 1925,div.VI,n:o13). Alcohol was also an important stimulus in these homicides. In at least half of cases of homicide against one's own brother, either the victim or the perpetrator was intoxicated during the crime. There was an upward trend, since most lethal violent conflicts between brothers occurred in the latter half of the 1920s.

Our material includes a case wherein the motives and behaviours of the perpetrator differed from that in the cases above. In 1904, a young woman attempted to poison her younger siblings. The older one, who was 13 years old, noticed the bitter taste in time and survived. Newspapers explained, based on the survived brother's accounts, that the perpetrator had tried to eliminate her younger siblings to receive a larger share of forthcoming inheritance (HL 2/1904). However, the behaviour of the perpetrator indicates that she had not fully understood what she was doing. She made several attempts to escape, first shortly after her act and second on the morning of the first court session.

### ***Lethal violence against children, other relatives, and members of the household***

Although violence and chastisement against children has been common in the past (Bergenlöv 2009; Koskivirta 2017b), lethal violence against one's own children was not amongst the most frequent types of violence in our source material. Anu Koskivirta (2017a, 102) explains the low numbers of filicides by the fact that they were easy to conceal by presenting them as accidents or illnesses. The local pastor and the district police chief who decided whether a forensic post-mortem examination was needed did not suspect this if there were not visible signs of violence on the corpse or if there were no rumours of child homicide because infant and child mortality were high. Therefore, lethal violence against children (excluding infanticides) was not frequently addressed as a crime in the Turku Appellation Court.

The records of the Appellation Court include homicides wherein mainly small children were the victims. The perpetrator was, in most cases, the parent but sometimes another family member such as an uncle. Occasionally, both parents were together accused of murdering their child (1925,div.IV,n:o34). Continued violence against children formed one type of lethal violence in families. In one case, the father had systematically abused his small daughter several years before the child died at the age of five after severe abuse (1922,div.VI,n:o12.). Another form of child mistreatment was multi-victim child homicides that had different kinds of emotional elements, while mothers were tried for poisoning several of their children or when fathers aimed to kill the whole family. Children were also victims of severe lethal neglect (1912,div.I,n:o55).

Another portion of domestic homicides were committed by other relatives and household members, which illuminates how manifold social ties accompanied by living situations and care relations sometimes sparked strong emotions such as displeasure, anger, or frustration. For

example, a belligerent brother-in-law faced lethal attack when he was picking a fight with some relatives. The drunken victim had come to pick his young child from his relative's home, while an argument escalated into a fatal fight between brothers-in-law (1915,div.III,n:o26). Altogether, some domestic homicides occurred between non-relatives within the household. A middle-aged woman was accused along with her companion of killing a man she was working for as a housekeeper in his croft. It was alleged that the motivation for the homicide stemmed from the fact that the croft occupant had not allowed her to bring the man she was seeing to his household (1920,div.VI,n:o12).

### **Fatalistic violence, affect, and gender**

As has been noted, it appears that at least certain characters of fatalistic violence defined by Maurice Cottier and Silvo Raciti (2013, 114–118) were noticeable in our material at the turn of the century. Fatal violence was conceptualised as a part of the modern habitus, which was based on the individualistic experience of life and subjectivity. The underlying features of fatalistic violence were the strong and often contradictory feelings of the perpetrator toward the victim, who often was a close family member. The criminal act had a relatively long prehistory, which involved menace and death threats, and the offender often aimed to commit suicide after the murder. Acts of fatal violence were premeditated, and there were no quarrels immediately before the murder, albeit the perpetrator might have been overwrought.

The above-mentioned features prevailed in our cases as well to some extent. A prehistory with threats of killing was a significant feature preceding lethal domestic violence. Offenders announced their intentions to kill their victims prior to the acts (e.g. UL 44/1906; 1929,div.II,n:o69, *Suomen Sosiaalidemokraatti* 31.12.1928; 1918,div.II,n:o18, *Työ* 30.11.1917). So was the case when a young man attempted to kill his mother with an axe. It was stated in the press that when he was drunk, he was quarrelsome, and he had previously threatened to kill her (1912,div.V,n:o11, *Uusi Suometar* 13.1.1912). In another case, a man shot his wife in 1908 (HL 27/1908, *Lahti* 31.3., 2.4.1908). The local ministers had given him a statutory warning already in 1906.

When men have felt that they were not able to meet society's expectations or fulfil their own hopes, they often turned on their wives. For men who were not succeeding in a society that appreciated wealth, the pressure to be sober and successful intensified their sense of themselves

as failures, increasing the likelihood that they would be unable to leave off drinking or other malign manners, which devastated their marriage and family (Roth 2009, 259–261; Cottier & Raciti 2013). The increasingly expanding press, which published news of bankrupts and other economic adversities, strengthened these feelings. These were also understandable reasons for the male suicides, although the growing number of suicides was otherwise seen as a reprehensible phenomenon. On the other hand, the new publicity offered by the press allowed better opportunities for the wives to restrict the malpractice of their husbands (Valtonen 2003; Eriksson 2010, 22).

Suicide attempts and domestic homicides were interrelated to some extent with each other, as offenders attempted suicides after acts of violence, especially in the 20th century (UL 29/1906; 1925,div.V,n:o24; 1925,div.VI,n:o14; 1929,div.I,n:o84; see also Adler 2003). Some perpetrators survived due to hospital treatment. In other cases, the accused confessed that they had suicidal thoughts after the crime but were convinced not to conduct it.

One significant form of domestic homicide was cases, which involved multiple victims within the family. Both male and female offenders did commit such crimes, and the victims consisted of various members of the household, such as children, spouses, parents, siblings, and relatives of spouses. Hence, this category represents the dissimilarity of such crimes and provides insight into the complexity of troubled family relations. A man in his 20s killed his 17-year-old brother in his sleep while his mother was working on a night shift. After the deed, the perpetrator waited until his mother arrived and attacked her. The case was addressed in the press as ‘*a beastly brutal act*’ (1918,div.II,n:o18, *Uusi Päivä* 5.12.1917).

Although the sex distribution of homicide has varied in previous centuries, and while there are temporal and regional variations, this was not fundamentally different compared to modern patterns. Homicide has been a crime mainly involving males, since males have predominated among offenders as well as victims. (Eisner 2003, 108–111; Smith 2014, 142–143) Our findings represent a similar tendency. Most offenders and victims were male, although women did occasionally commit homicides. A husband or her child were the most common victims of female offenders, albeit they also killed or tried to kill their parents-in-laws and other household members (see also Muurling et al. 2020, 10). Female offenders did not commit homicides due to self-defence in confrontational situations. Nor does our data suggest that the most common type of homicide by female killers was initiated in revenge for sustained marital violence.

Homicides committed by women in our material could be characterised as premeditated crimes. Female perpetrators were circumspect in their violent acts, and they executed reasoned crimes which involved at least some form of planning. This was most self-evident in the cases where the victim was poisoned (Nilsson 2015, 103). One can presume that rat poison or phenol were commonly available in households, but the use of such poisons as strychnine, which were available only by prescription in pharmacies, required planning and the acquisition of poison beforehand. For example, in 1892, the teacher's wife had told her doctor that they needed one strychnine capsule because an old dog had to be put down. On the following evening, she mixed it in her husband's tea (HL 49/1892).

Women who murdered their family members were not viewed sympathetically, but rather with disapproval. Some women were also accused of killing more than one victim within the family (1921,div.I,n:o40; 1921,div.IV,n:o43;). Female perpetrators also selected victims who suffered from an illness or were disabled (1912,div.I,n:o55; 1921,div.IV,n:o43; 1925,div.IV,n:o24). Some of these murders were cruel and calculated. When a woman was poisoning her stepson and an elderly man in the household, concerned villagers had urged them to seek a doctor. On the way to visit the doctor, the woman left the child somewhere along the journey and went by herself to the doctor. The woman had used caustic soda, which had burned the child's mouth and throat so severely that he was not able to eat. Describing the gruesome murders, newspapers characterised the female murderer as 'bestly' and stated that she had kept things under such a strict rule that even the master of the house had feared her (1921,div.IV,n:o43, *Uusi Aika* 21.9.1921).

## **Conclusion**

Finnish society witnessed many changes from the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, when the pre-modern agrarian society, which had been based on the power and authority of the household master over his children, wife, and servants, was gradually shifting towards modernity (Pylkkänen 2009, 37, 40). These changes were intertwined in a much wider manner with household relations and changing conceptions of patriarchal hierarchy and welfare in families (Lindstedt Cronberg 2009; Eriksson 2010).

Our analysis of the Appellation Court documents as well as newspaper reports has highlighted that domestic homicides constituted a broad range of violent acts, although killing one's spouse, killing one's father, and killing one's own brother were the most prevalent homicides within families. Motivations and circumstances leading to domestic homicides encompassed a varied range of factors. Abusive relationships and prolonged violence were major underlying causes of domestic homicides. This was the case mainly in marital violence but also in some cases with other family members. Heated domestic quarrels were one of the main characteristics of domestic male-on-male homicides, which also applied to marital violence committed by husbands. Conversely, female offenders mainly committed crimes which were premeditated and were directed towards children, husbands and persons in vulnerable positions. Alcohol-related violence was notable in many crimes, such as in fraternal confrontations and to a degree in marital homicides committed by husbands, though it did not constitute a catalyst in all crime types, such as in crimes committed by female killers or in homicides towards children.

Altogether, the experiences and emotions connected to violence did vary, along with the differing types of domestic violence. Intricate family problems involved different forms of conflict, prolonged quarrels, domestic violence, and alcohol problems. Social and economic bonds between family members were strong, which led to lethal quarrels and homicides over material issues. These problems made such emotions as hatred, anger, fear, and frustration visible. Most of the cases analysed exemplify that the traditional forms of domestic violence, such as homicides and battering, were closely related to questions of authority and patriarchal hierarchy or questions of property. Modernisation not only intensified these problems; it also created new individualised expectations and pressures which could erupt into fatalistic violence in close relations or into suicidal acts (Cottier & Raciti 2013; Roth 2014, 183–184). Newspapers also recognised and emphasised these motives.

## References

### *Archival sources*

*The National Archives of Finland (FNA), Turku*

The Turku Court of Appeal, judgement records 1891–1898, 1901–1908, 1911–1912, 1915, 1918, 1920–1922, 1925, 1929

*The National Library of Finland*



Newspapers, Digital Collections, [https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/etusivu?set\\_language=en](https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/etusivu?set_language=en), referred 6.2.2020

### **Literature**

Adler, J. S. (2003). "We've got a right to fight: We're married": Domestic homicide in Chicago, 1875–1920. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 34 no. 1, *Project MUSE* [muse.jhu.edu/article/43146](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/43146), 27–48.

Bala, N. (2008). A historical perspective on family violence and child abuse, *Journal of Family Studies*, Vol. 14 (2–3).

Bergenlöv, E. (2009). *Drabbade barn: Aga och barnmisshandel i Sverige från reformationen till nutid*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.

Cottier, M. & Raciti, S. (2013). From honour to subjectivity: Interpersonal violence in Basel 1750–1868 and Berne 1861–1944. *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés/Crime, History & Societies*, Vol 17 (2), 101–124.

Daly, M. & Wilson, M. (2014). *Homicide*. New Brunswick & London: Aldine Transaction.

Eisner, M. (2003). Long-term historical trends in violent crime. The University of Chicago. Available online at: <https://soci.ucalgary.ca/brannigan/sites/soci.ucalgary.ca.brannigan/files/long-term-historical-trends-of-violent-crime.pdf>, 83–142.

Eriksson, M. (2010). *Makar emellan: Äktenskaplig oenighet och våld på kyrkliga och politiska arenor 1810–1880*. <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:356163/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

Ferguson, E. E. (2010). *Gender and justice: Violence, intimacy, and community in fin-de-siècle Paris*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Gordon, L. (1988). *Heroes of their own lives: The politics and history of family violence, Boston 1880–1960*. New York: Viking.

Koskivirta, A. (2017a). Crimes of desperation: Poverty-related filicides in 1810–1860. *Journal of Finnish Studies*, Vol. 20 (1), 97–131.

Koskivirta, A. (2017b). Lethal chastisement of children in pre-industrial Finland (c. 1700–1860): Reasons, practices and control. In M. Husso, T. Virkki, M. Notko, H. Hirvonen, J. Eilola (eds.), *Interpersonal violence: Differences and connections*. London & New York: Routledge, 46–66.

Lehti, M. (2001). Homicide trends in Finland and Estonia in 1880–1940: Consequences of the demography, social and political effects of industrialization. *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention*, Vol. 2 (1), 50–71.

Lindstedt Cronberg, M. (2009). *Med våldsam hand. Hustrumisshandel i 1800-talets Sverige. En studie av rättsliga, kyrkliga och politiska sammanhang*. Lund: Mediatryck, Lunds universitet.

[https://internt.ht.lu.se/media/documents/persons/MarieLindstedtCronberg/Med\\_valdsam\\_han\\_d.\\_Hustrumisshandel\\_i\\_1800\\_talets\\_Sverige.pdf](https://internt.ht.lu.se/media/documents/persons/MarieLindstedtCronberg/Med_valdsam_han_d._Hustrumisshandel_i_1800_talets_Sverige.pdf)

Lövkrona (ed.), Inger (2009). *Mord, misshandel och sexuella övergrepp: Historiska och kulturella perspektiv på kön och våld*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.

Mc Mahon, R. & Eibach, J., Roth, R. (2013). Making sense of violence? Reflections on the history of interpersonal violence in Europe. *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies*. Vol. 17, Iss. 2, 5–26.

Muurling, S.; Pluskota, M., van der Heijden, M. (2020) Introduction: Women and crime in history. In M. van der Heijden, M. Pluskota, S. Muurling (eds.), *Women's criminality in Europe, 1600-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nilsson, R. (2015). 'Arsenic of the size of a pea': Women and poisoning in the 19th-century Sweden. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol. 40 (1), 97–118.

Pleck, E. (1987). *Domestic tyranny: The making of social policy against family violence from colonial era the present*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pylkkänen, A. (2009) *Trapped in equality: Women as legal persons in modernisation of finnish law*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.

Ramsey, C. B. (2006). Intimate homicide: Gender and crime control, 1880-1920. *University of Colorado Law Review*, Vol. 77, University of Colorado Law Legal Studies Research Paper No. 06-11. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=817126>,

Rautelin, M. (2017). Offences of the flesh? Infanticide as a consequence of cryptic pregnancy in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Finland. In M. Husso, T. Virkki, M. Notko, H. Hirvonen, J. Eilola (eds.), *Interpersonal violence: Differences and connections*. London & New York: Routledge, 33–45.

Roth, R. (2014), Gender, sex and intimate-partner violence in historical perspective. In R. Gartner, B. McCarthy (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of gender, sex and crime*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Roth, R. (2009). *American homicide*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Smith, G. T. (2014). Long-term trends in female and male involvement in crime” In R. Gartner, B. McCarthy (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of gender, sex and crime*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Toivo, R. M. (2018). Parricide in nineteenth-century Finland: Cultures of violence and a crisis of authority. In M. Muravyeva, R. M. Toivo (eds.), *Parricide and violence against parents throughout history: (De)constructing family and authority?* Palgrave Macmillan, 191–212.

Toivo, R. M. (2016). Abuse of parents in early modern Finland: Structures and emotions. *Journal of Family History*, vol. 41, no. 3, doi:[10.1177/0363199016644588](https://doi.org/10.1177/0363199016644588), 255–270.

Valtonen, H. (2003). Itsemurha ja sosiaaliset rajat 1800-luvun lopun ja 1900-luvun alun suomalaisen sivistyneistön lehdistöpuheessa. In J. Eilola (ed.), *Sietämättömät ja täydellinen maailma: Kirjoituksia suvaitsemattomuudesta*. Jyväskylä: Kopijyvä, 311–346.

Wilkinson, C. (2020). Gender and Dutch newspaper reports of intimate violence, 1880–1910. In M. van der Heijden, M. Pluskota, S. Muurling (eds.), *Women's criminality in Europe, 1600-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 206–225.

Wiltenburg, J. (2004). True crime: The origins of modern sensationalism. *American Historical Review*, Vol. 109 (5), 1377–1404.